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NOTES ON THE HOKKAIDO BEAR *URSUS ARCTOS* *YESOENSIS* LYDEKKER LEAVING HIBERNA- TION AS REPORTED IN ETOROFU ISLAND OF THE KURILE GROUP.

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The Hokkaido bear *Ursus arctos yesoensis* Lydekker is at the present time found very frequently on the southern Kurile islands, Etorofu and Kunashiri. Shikotan to the south of these islands differs in several respects from the main Kuriles and the most striking difference in regard to fauna is the complete absence of the bear. For this reason the Ainu (Kurilsky) who were brought by the Japanese government from Paramushir in 1884 to Shikotan found existence extremely difficult. Cap. H. G. Snow a famous British Sea Otter hunter who visited the island a few years later 1891 was beseeched by the Kurilsky Ainu to be taken back to Paramushir so they could hunt the bear and seek out more profitable existence. Finally the Japanese government organized an excursion for these unfortunate people and gave them a vacation and bear hunt on Paramushir. Since the turn of the century living conditions for the Ainu have continued to become more and more difficult and the number of pure Kurilsky Ainu has decreased until today there are probably few more than eight or ten people left out of greater number that came from Paramushir.¹⁾ The remaining thirty to forty Ainu there are Japanese-Ainu half breeds. These today maintain themselves by fishing during the summer months.

The size and frequency of the brown bear found in Kunashiri and Etorofu

1) Snow says the number of Shikotan Ainu in 1891 was fifty-nine. Landor who visited Shikotan in 1893 gives the number brought from Paramushir as ninety. He further says that only sixty were on Shikotan at that time as thirty had already died (p. 128)

warrents no safety. At dusk or on a foggy day the danger of attack is great. It is quite common for the animal to come across the horse trails or to make wallows in the bamboo grass near the pathways. Near Toshimoe in Etorofu I saw a large area of this sort smashed down as effectively as if a roller had done the work. This was certainly testimonial to the great strength of the brute when one remembers the amount of energy required on the part of a man in clearing an area of the same size. Frequently people are killed or badly injured by the bear in the Kuriles. At Tomari on Kunashiri an Ainu was at the time of my visit to the Kuriles lying in the hospital of that village at the point of death due to wounds inflicted about the face by a savage attack of the bear.

The first snow fall in Etorofu is around the first or second week of October, depending upon the meteorological conditions. Along the east coast it seldom averages over a meter in depth, just sufficient to cover the bamboo grass. In the higher hills and mountains it may reach a much greater depth. Whereas the bear in Hokkaido enters hibernation towards the end of November the same animal finds cover in Etorofu around the first to the middle of October. This is due to the earlier approach of winter in the island.

November is probably the worst month of the year in the Kurile waters, whereas the latter part of the winter season is clear and bracingly cold. The bad reputation the Kuriles have for weather is probably enlarged upon somewhat due to the extremely unpleasant nature of the month of November. In the early days of exploration and colonization a great deal of Otter hunting was carried on during the early months of winter. Consequently bad weather met with at this season was remembered more than the extremely fine winter days of January and February. During these two months there is very little if any snow at all. The snowfall is much lighter than central Hokkaido and the number of clear days greater. The snow begins to melt around the first of April and hunting of the bear is at its best during that season. Hunters use snow shoes or walk in fish skin boots on the firm crusted snow and secure the bear soon after it leaves hibernation.

This year (1931) three bears observed breaking hibernation were found in a den at an elevation of about 700 meters. The location was to the northwest

of Toshimoe on the east coast of Etorofu (Fig. 1.). The den itself was located about one mile from a stream valley at the foot of Mt. MARUYAMA. This vicinity is a favorite place for hunters to go on snow shoes during the latter weeks of March and the earlier part of April to secure the bears as soon as they leave hibernation. This den herewith described was discovered during the first week of April 1931, the exact day was not recorded.



Near Toshimoe on the east coast of Etorofu looking north. Mt. Maruyama (800 meters) in middle foreground.

The location of the den was first sighted at a distance of about three hundred yards. It was simply a hole in the snow with a diameter of about eighteen inches. Attention was attracted by a considerable amount of vapour rising from it; the breath of the animals beneath. As preparation was made to examine further, the snout of a bear appeared through the hole to be followed soon by the bear boldly throwing back the snow and jumping out onto the firm crust. Almost immediately there followed in the same manner two smaller animals, both two year old females.²⁾ The large female mother measured over seven feet in length and the cubs around five. She was strong and lean with no surplus fat of any sort, neither was she emaciated. Her actions were extremely quick and her responses in a physical way accounted for no type of sluggishness. She was in every respect normal during the few moments be-

2) Other reports show that sometimes they are one year old cubs. Occasionally only one cub is found with the mother during hibernation.

fore she met her death at the hands of the hunter. Observations made before by naturalists in North America, particularly in the Yellowstone district attests to the fact that the bear is active at the moment it leaves hibernation. It has been noted sometimes by these observers that physical reaction and emaciation sets in a few weeks after leaving hibernation. This can be accounted for in the fact that often times at such a season food is extremely difficult to obtain. Usually the bears eat whatever is available as soon as possible after leaving hibernation.

The two younger female cubs with the mother were no less as active as she. Both were in strong healthy condition. The feet of the bears were normal as was also the fur, which is found at this season of the year in its best condition.

The den measurements were hard to estimate as the bear destroyed most of the prominent features of it upon leaving so hurriedly. Located on a hill side the bears had dug out a shelter or cave about six feet long and four to five feet deep, a sort of hollow in the hillside. This location avoided any trouble there might be from surface or snow water. The bear never makes or locates its hibernation den where there might be danger of being disturbed by water. After the snows had come and buried the animals to a depth of four to five feet, hibernation had been spent apparently unmolested. The hillside was sparsely wooded and only partly protected from the prevailing northwestern winds. The site of the den was made extremely unpleasant by the presence of a great amount of faeces.³⁾

Hunters in Etorofu very seldom find bears as reported above. Dens broken open are sometimes found but it is very rarely that the exit from the den is observed. The weather at the time was clear with slight frost; a little before the main snow melt took place in April of 1931.

Thanks are due to Mr. K. MUKASA of this University who helped in collecting the above data.

3) Hunters report concerning the bear found in Hokkaido, that the den is always free from faeces, entirely contradictory to the situation reported in Etorofu Island.

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摘 要

エトロフ島の熊の冬眠末期に於ける一観察

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北海道に産する熊は南千島に於てはクナシリ及びエトロフの二島に産すれども色丹島の如きには全くこれを見ず、ために往年パラムシル島より移住せるアイヌの如き色丹島に生活すること能はざりし状態なりき。エトロフ島の熊に就いて述べんに北海道産と等しく性狂暴にして屢々人畜をも襲ひ危険少なからず北海道本島に於ては熊の冬眠は十一月末なれども千島に於ては概ね十月中旬にしてこの時既に積雪を見冬期は一米を下らず一般に千島方面は一二月に天候好晴の日多く十一月を最悪とす、然し融雪は四月に初めて起り、この時季が熊の冬眠より覺る時なり。余の見聞せし一例はエトロフ島トシモへの市外を去る一哩の七百米の山腹に發見せられし冬眠中の熊の例なり、この附近には敢て樹木なく防風設備の如きを見ず。初め徑十八時の穴を雪上に認めそれより熊の呼吸による水蒸氣を見たりと云ふ。この穴中には三頭の熊を見皆雌にして内二頭は二才仔なり、親熊は丈七呎に及べり。人の近くや猛然と雪を蹴つて跳り出でその勢毫も夏期活動期に於けるものと異らず。その穴は高さ 四、五呎深さ六呎にして斜面に作られたれば雪水の浸入することなし。穴中は糞便多く不快な臭氣に満てりと云へばこれ北海道産熊と多少赴を異にす。後者に於ては冬眠の穴は概して極めて清潔なり。

本稿を草するに當り援助を賜りし武笠氏に謝意を表す。